

Conservation Planning Q&A

What is a Conservation Plan?

Conservation plans under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) are modeled on Recovery Plans required under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). (MMPA Sec 115(b)(2)) Conservation plans are prepared as soon as possible for stocks designated as depleted. (MMPA Sec. 115(b)(1)(C))

Are there any differences between a Conservation Plan and a Recovery Plan?

The goal of a Conservation Plan under the MMPA is the conservation and restoration of the stock to its Optimum Sustainable Population (OSP) level. The goal of a Recovery Plan under the ESA is the conservation and survival of the species.

What is Optimum Sustainable Population (OSP) level?

NMFS regulations at 50 CFR 216.3 clarify the definition of OSP as a population size that falls within the range from the population level of a given species or stock that is the largest supportable in the ecosystem (carrying capacity or K) to its maximum net productivity level (MNPL). MNPL is the abundance or population level that results in the greatest net annual increment (increase) in population numbers of biomass resulting from additions to the population from reproduction, less losses due to natural mortality.

What are the required components of a Conservation Plan?

1. Objective measurable criteria, which when met, would result in the conservation and restoration of the stock to its OSP
2. A description of site specific management actions necessary for recovery
3. Estimates of time and cost to carry out the recommended recovery measures.

Does a Conservation Plan create new regulations?

A Conservation Plan is not a regulation on its own. The plan may recommend regulatory actions and/or provide guidance for voluntary initiatives. Any new regulations would go through a public review process.

Have any Conservation Plans been done for marine mammals?

There is a *Conservation Plan for the Northern Fur Seal*. Several Recovery Plans have been completed for marine mammals listed under the Endangered Species Act. Those plans are available on the NOAA Fisheries web page at:
www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR3/recovery.html

What opportunities exist for public participation in the Conservation Planning process?

During the process to designate Southern Resident killer whales as depleted under the MMPA, several public comment periods allowed for public input. NOAA Fisheries held a kick-off meeting on May 31, 2003 ([link](#)) to inform the community about conservation planning and allow interested individuals and groups to sign up to be involved in future meetings and workshops. NOAA Fisheries is conducting a series of workshops on specific topics that have been identified as potential factors in the decline of the Southern Residents.

What is the purpose of the various workshops being held?

The topic-specific workshops being held by NOAA Fisheries Northwest Regional Office focus on *identifying management actions* that can be incorporated into the Conservation Plan. These management actions are based on the current state of knowledge about killer whales and the potential factors impacting them. The Northwest Fisheries Science Center is holding workshops to *identify data gaps and prioritize research needs* for killer whales.

The Regional Office and the Science Center are working closely together and sharing information from the various workshops to ensure that the research program and Conservation Plan complement each other. For example, during discussions of management actions, unknowns often arise that will require research to find answers and move forward with science-based management decisions. When data gaps are identified during discussions of management, this information is passed on to the Science Center to plug into their discussions and development of a research plan.

What is the relationship between the Northwest Regional Office and the Science Center?

NOAA Fisheries has Regional Offices and Science Centers. The Science Centers conduct research to serve as the scientific basis for conservation and management of marine living resources and their ecosystems. The Regional Offices manage marine resources through the administration of existing laws and regulations in the context of the best available science.

What is the role of research in a Conservation Plan?

Conservation Plans may include research as part of the actions recommended to conserve depleted stocks. For many depleted stocks, there are gaps in our knowledge of the causes for declines, long-term reproductive processes and even basic ecology of the animals and how they interact with the ecosystem. Identifying key research questions is often a critical component to developing and implementing solid management actions to conserve a depleted stock.